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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"

Sigh. It's the weekend which marks the unofficial end of the summer season. Sure, there are still a few weeks left, but Labor Day weekend means back to school for the kids, summer resort areas start to slow down and close, and the weather cools. Not all bad things, mind you, but it's a psychological thing, I guess.

I don't have much to say this week. I was going to make a few comments regarding the presidential elections and conventions, but those are still going on, and I was never really into soap operas!

So, while I continue to plan this long weekend's schedule of events (what projects need doing), I'll leave you to another weekend of a good A-ONE read!

Until next time...

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!

ACEC Swap Meet

ACEC Swap Meet September 13, 2008

ATARI COMPUTER ENTHUSIASTS
OF COLUMBUS, OHIO
VINTAGE COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAME SWAP MEET

September 13, 2008
9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. EDT
Oakland Park Community Center
980 Lenore St.

All vintage and classic computers, video games, systems, accessories, games, and software invited!

Vendor and Flea Marketeer donation: Free!
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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, it looks like we may actually have enough messages to talk about some Atari stuff this week! Imagine that!

First, though (and you just KNEW there was going to be a "but first...", didn't you?), I want to talk for a moment about what happened this past week: Barack Obama was nominated by the Democratic Party for President of the United States. Now, whether you support him or not, this really is a historic moment... and on the anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech, no less!

When Dr. King made that speech, I was a mere 3 years old. But I remember hearing it over and over in school. But even then, the import of the speech, the man and the movement was kind of lost. I mean, I was a middle-class white kid in a comfortable verging-on-rural suburb. It seems funny now that I could have been so shielded from what was going on, even in the late 60's, but I guess I was. But to this day I'm not sure if it was because I was brought up where I was or because I was too young to appreciate the import of what was happening.

As I watched Obama's speech, I wondered: Will people look at this speech four decades from now and point to it as a turning point or a watershed event? I don't know. I don't think anyone does... yet.

Of course, a lot will depend on what happens in November. If Obama wins the election, his nomination speech may become known as "the start of it all" which, while not accurate, would at least be memorable. Of course, if he is elected in November and is able to deliver an inauguration speech the likes of Kennedy's or the caliber of one of Lincoln's speeches, Obama's acceptance speech may be forgotten.

But what about if Obama doesn't win the election? Well, that'd be some ground-breaking stuff too. John McCain would be the oldest person elected U.S. President.

It doesn't seem to have the same import as "The First Black Man Elected President", does it? I'm not taking anything away from McCain... his

service to this country are to be commended... but being the oldest man to be elected isn't quite the same as being the first black man to be elected.

Someone asked Michelle Obama how she thought she might feel when/if she entered the White House as First Lady and gazed upon the room where, when John Adams first entered, slaves were still plastering the walls. I thought it was a silly question to ask. No, not because its of no import, but because Michelle Obama has no way of knowing how she might feel... that particular situation has never occured before. She has very little to go by.

At any rate, we are indeed living in historic times. I would hope that, one day in the future, people will read about the opening decade of the 21st Century and the election of the first black man to the office of President and say, "So, what's the big deal? Did anyone really care what color he was?" The answer, even today, unfortunately, is 'yes'. But they are a dying breed.

Well, enough of that. Let's get to the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Jean-Luc Ceccoli asks for help with MiNT hard drive partitions larger than one gigabyte:

"OK, now I have MiNT running from r:\.
When preparing my disk, I set a partition with 4094 kB. It is for very large data that I will not have to access under plain TOS, so it is Q:\ - just before the lnx one -.

I tested it under MagiC!, which let me copy/retrieve data to/from it with no problem.

But MiNT seems not to like it, stating something about fat being too small, and this is reported when trying to access the drive too (I use Thing as a desktop).

There are 2 alertboxes displayed then :
- for Thing, "No information available about drive Q:! (TOS -46)"
- for XaAES , "pid 104 (thing): FATFS (Q): FAT too small (FAT size = 8174, minfat = 8175)"

I tried to change the value of cache into mint.cnf from 4096 to 6144, then to 8192, but it didn't help. What might I have done wrong?"

Peter Pera tells Jean-Luc:

"As I know we need to init FAT32 partitions after partitioning with Hddrutil, before using with Mint. There is mkfs util for that. I did not test latest V., 8.22, but no reason to think that FAT32 init is changed.

FAT32 partitions may have diverse parameters as cluster sizes, reserved sector count, number of bootsectors, some IDs, etc... As I

see, Mint32 works well with partitions created with Windows. Myself made partitioner which can init FAT32 parts., but their format is taken from sample FAT32 partitions made with WinXP.

As authors of Magic and Uwe Seimet worked tight together it is normal that Magic and Hddriver understand each good. Btw. Uwe said that he even did not test latest hddriver with Mint. So, you need mkfs for Atari."

'G Gnkua' adds:

"What type is the partition? If you just want the data to be accessible only by mint, you should go for ext2. For MagiC/Mint I guess F32 should work, but I never tried it.

If you go to the console and try commands like "ls", does it work? "df" would be a good idea too. If those work then it might be the desktop's fault and not the OS'."

Jean-Luc replies to both:

"Well, I use HD-Driver in its latest release - 8.22- from Uwe Seimet, and it is a f32 partition.

But what do you mean by parameters of partition being the problem ? HD-Driver manages all by itself, just tell it the size and type of the partition you want to create. What puzzles me is that MagiC! can read it correctly, but not MiNT."

Jean-Luc does some digging around and then posts:

"Ooooooops! As it was accessable under MagiC!, I thought it would be under MiNT as well. A little "mkfatfs Q:" made it MiNT readable."

Jean-Luc now asks about extracting files from MSA disk images:

"Is it possible to extract files from an ST or MSA image without having to restore it onto a floppy? Are there tools allowing that?"

Peter Pera replies:

"Yes. http://www.ppest.org/atari/floimgd.php

Or may do it with Steem emulator. There are even some programs for Ataris. But it is for hard disk users."

Jean-Luc replies:

"Fine. And one which runs on real TOS-machines?"

Adam Klobukowski points Jean-Luc in the right direction:

"Jay MSA: http://phoenix.inf.upol.cz/~opichals/jay/ "

Well folks, that's it for this week. Hopefully we'll see more messages on the UseNet on a regular basis now that summer is drawing to an end. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Amazon Offers 'Release-Date Delivery'!
Heroes over Europe in 2009!
Red Baron Arcade!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Heroes over Europe Coming in 2009 For
Xbox 360, Playstation 3, and Windows PC

Get ready to scramble! Atari and Red Mile Entertainment are bringing Heroes over Europe, an ultra-realistic seat-of-the-pants tactical flight combat game and the latest in the critically acclaimed Heroes series, to the Xbox 360 video game and entertainment system from Microsoft, PlayStation 3 computer entertainment system, and Windows PC in 2009.

The sequel to the mighty World War II flight combat game Heroes of the Pacific, Heroes over Europe takes aspiring combat pilots into the bullet-ridden heart of major World War II European air battles in glorious dogfight-friendly high definition. Heroes over Europe follows the Allied campaign from the attacks on London to the destruction of Berlin, with players under orders to strap themselves into the authentically rendered cockpits of the campaign's iconic aircraft. Their mission: to survive the most intense dogfights ever seen in a flight combat game.

"The Heroes series has brought some of the world's most exciting air battles in history to gamers all over the world, and Heroes over Europe builds on the series' impressive legacy with highly detailed realistic visual presentation and an even deeper online experience," said Cyril Voiron, VP Brand Management Worldwide Publishing, Atari.

"Transmission Games did an incredible job on the first game, Heroes of the Pacific, and this second game in the series is definitely benefiting from that experience," said Simon Price, President of Red Mile

Entertainment. "We are very excited to partner with Atari to bring this stunning title to gamers worldwide."

Developed by Transmission Games (formerly IR Gurus) in Melbourne, Australia, and powered by an all-new engine, Heroes over Europe is set to raise the bar for flight combat games, with new and unique game modes, and deeper and more comprehensive online gameplay for up to 16 players. Visually, the game takes no prisoners with meticulously rendered environments including faithful recreations of London and Berlin, and ultra-realistic iconic warplanes of the era, all presented in stunning high definition graphics. With additional content available to download from launch, Heroes over Europe is scheduled for release in 2009.

This title is not yet concept approved by Microsoft.

"Heroes over Europe" is the sequel to "Heroes of the Pacific," which was published in 2005 on the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, the Xbox video game system from Microsoft, and the PC, and has sold more than 600,000 units worldwide. Both titles are developed by Transmission Games in Melbourne, Australia. "Heroes over Europe" has not yet been rated by the ESRB. For more information, please visit http://www.heroesovereurope.com.

Red Baron Arcade to Take-off on PlayStation Network

This is your captain speaking. Strap on that flight suit, as Sierra Online has cleared Red Baron Arcade for take-off on PlayStation network on Sept. 18, 2008. An intense arcade air combat game with online multiplayer capabilities, Red Baron Arcade follows burgeoning pilots as they take to the unfriendly skies and compete to rise through the ranks of the Red Baron s squadron.

Set in the midst of World War I, Red Baron Arcade pits players against the best pilots of the century in devious dogfights, where they must swoop and dodge their way to victory. Manning the gun turrets on WWI-themed aircraft, players can battle conniving computer AI, or wage war against up to seven other aspiring "Aces" online in Deathmatch, Team-Deathmatch, and Capture the Flag modes.

Co-piloting with the release of Red Baron Arcade will be a free PlayStation Network demo of the game. And as a PlayStation Network first, recruits will get a taste of the multiplayer action to test their acrobatic flying skills against other Red Baron Arcade pilots in a special battle arena available in the Red Baron Arcade demo for up to eight players online.

Red Baron Arcade is rated T for Teen and flies onto PlayStation Network Sept. 18, 2008.

Amazon: Get Games the Day They’re Released

Amazon has announced that they will now be offering release day delivery for Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, Fable 2, and Gears of War 2.

During checkout, customers can choose to upgrade their shipping to ’Release-Date Delivery’ for $5.98 to guarantee that they get the game on the day it comes out, while Amazon Prime customers will receive the upgrade for free.

For those looking to order a new release from the web and play it the day it’s released, this is the best deal we’ve seen. In comparison, ground shipping (three-plus days) from GameStop is $5.99, two-day is $6.99, and overnight is $9.99. The other options for Amazon customers are the free super saver shiipping (five to nine days), standard shipping for $4.49 (five business days), two-day shipping for $8.98, and one-day shipping for $15.48.

When we spoke to Amazon regarding this new option, they called it their way of "going the extra mile for our customers when it comes to providing them with convenience." While this may legitimately be the case, offering the option for no charge to Amazon Prime members indicates their focus here might be on driving more people to subscribe to the $79-per-year service. With the national average price of gas at $3.68 a gallon, according to the Energy Information Administration, having Amazon go that "extra mile" for us doesn’t seem like a bad idea. Especially for those who find themselves traveling long distances to get a game only to be met with, "Sorry, we’re sold out."

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Space: The Final Frontier for Computer Viruses

The first ever reported computer virus has infected at least two laptops onboard the International Space Station more than 200 miles above Earth.

The worm, believed to be W32.Gammima.AG, steals personal information used to play online games from infected computers and then attempts to send the information back to a remote computer, according to SpaceRef.com, which broke the news on Monday.

The virus was not the first to hit a space station last month, just the first one that was reported, NASA spokesman Kelly Humphries told Wired News. He described it as a "nuisance" that infected computers that are mostly used for applications like e-mail and not critical systems.

Officials were trying to figure out how the virus got onboard. The space station has no direct Internet access - astronauts send and receive mail through a KU band data link, according to Humphries. Reports speculated it may have spread via a USB memory device.

The International Space Station is a collaboration between NASA, the European Space Agency, and the space agencies of Japan, Russia, and Canada.

Microsoft Plans Native Privacy Features for IE8

Microsoft on Monday revealed some new privacy features for Internet Explorer 8, the next version of its market-leading Web browser. The features address the concerns of consumers and privacy advocates, who called the plans a positive step.

The new features will let users control their history, cookies and other information that IE8 stores. Other features aim to help users control how their browsing history is shared by Web sites. By default, IE8 browses the Web the same way IE7 does.

"Having privacy native in the browser as opposed to just an extension is something we've been advocating for a long time from all the browser manufacturers," said Ari Schwartz, deputy director at the Center for Democracy and Technology. "Incorporating all of these privacy features at once is a major step forward. Safari has some built-in privacy and Firefox has extensions. Native privacy is better."

When a new feature called InPrivate Browsing is activated, new cookies are not stored. Rather, all new cookies become session cookies and existing cookies can still be read. New history entries will not be recorded and new temporary Internet files will be deleted after the private browsing window is closed. Form data, passwords, queries typed into a search box, visited links, and addresses typed into the address bar are not stored.

"If you are using a shared PC, a borrowed laptop from a friend, or a public PC, sometimes you don't want other people to know where you've been on the Web. Internet Explorer 8's InPrivate Browsing makes that 'over the shoulder' privacy easy by not storing history, cookies, temporary Internet files, or other data," Andy Zeigler, a program manager at Microsoft, wrote in the company's blog.

IE8 will also offer a feature to delete browsing history without deleting cookies that allow trusted Web sites to remember visitors. Financial Web sites, for example, often put a cookie on the PC to identify a user account to eliminate extra challenge questions that make logging in more tedious.

Another new feature, InPrivate Blocking, keeps a record of third-party items as users browse. When the privacy features are turned on, IE automatically blocks sites that have "seen" you across more than 10 sites. Since Web sites can track visitors without cookies, the only way to make sure data is not disclosed is to block the content and prevent communication to sites. InPrivate Subscriptions give users the ability to let software make the blocking decisions for them.

Microsoft's new efforts offer a good usability test for native privacy features in the browser, Schwartz said. In the future, however, the Center for Democracy and Technology would like to see the ability to leave the privacy features turned on all the time.

"Right now, each time you start a new browser session, you have to indicate that you want these features enabled," Schwartz said. "Second of all, all of these features are bundled together. So you can't just

choose to block third parties but still keep your history. Being able to separate out those features will be useful to people in the future."

New Beta of Internet Explorer 8 Ready for Download

The second beta release of Internet Explorer 8 is now available for download by developers and consumers alike on Windows-based PCs running Vista, XP, Server 2003 and Server 2008.

Microsoft’s next-generation browser for 32-bit and 64-bit computing platforms is currently available in English, Japanese, Chinese and German, with additional languages coming soon, said Dean Hachamovitch, general manager of Microsoft’s IE8 development team.

"While Beta 1 was for developers, we think that anyone who browses or works on the Web will enjoy IE8 Beta 2," Hachamovitch said.

Suggested Sites is one good example of the IE8 development team’s commitment to streamlining Web navigation. Click on the Suggested Sites button on the toolbar to see the top recommendations, based on choices made by online users visiting the same page.

In addition, the browser’s new address bar is no longer just for URLs. Simply type a keyword into IE8’s new "smart" address bar and the browser immediately searches across a user’s history, favorites and RSS feeds to identify all the resources accessed during past online sessions. Users also can hit the return key after inputting a word to tell the browser to display the results of a Windows Live search.

Moreover, IE8’s Web Slices capability gives users the ability to subscribe, view and interact with portions of their favorite Web sites with a single click on the Favorites bar.

"We looked very hard at how people really browse the Web," Hachamovitch said, "and tried a lot of different designs in front of many kinds of people, not just technologists."

Much like the Mozilla Labs new Ubiquity plug-in for Firefox 3, IE8’s Accelerators option makes it easy for users to launch a variety of online services without leaving the page currently being displayed. Simply highlight any text on a page and right-click on it to reference a map, define a word, place content in e-mails and blogs, or even translate foreign-language snippets into English.

"For Beta 2, we’ve worked with a lot of great partners to deliver a bunch of choices for users," Hachamovitch said. "They’re much faster and easier than the ’select, copy, new tab, navigate, paste, repeat’ process in today’s other browsers. We hope that Web sites - and enthusiasts - write more of them and give us feedback."

Browser crashes have been one of the most frustrating downsides to working with Internet Explorer 7 because the user loses every tabbed page open at the time. However, the loosely coupled structure of IE8 separates the browser’s frame from the tabs, and the tabs from each other.

"Crashes are more contained and affect fewer tabs than before," explained Hachamovitch. The last browsing session from the most recently

closed instance of IE8 can also be reopened.

Multiple tabs are now categorized into color-coded groups that make it easier for users to navigate among a large number of open Web pages. And if a tabbed page does crash, it will be automatically reloaded and any information the user may have already entered on the page is also restored.

If you are thinking about taking IE8 for a test drive, keep in mind that this is not a final product and it will not necessarily work smoothly with certain services, applications and add-on programs. But for the most part, Beta 2 integrates a number of improvements that can help users surf the Internet in a quicker and more efficient manner.

Check Point Releases ZoneAlarm 8.0

Check Point Software Technologies on Monday released ZoneAlarm Internet Security Suite 8.0. This new version includes enhancements to essential security and performance technologies as well as a redesigned user interface. It also updates the Identity Protection Center introduced in version 6.5. New versions of ZoneAlarm Pro and ZoneAlarm Antivirus have also been released.

The suite’s Early Boot Protection runs during system startup when, according to Check Point, "other security products leave systems vulnerable." Its OSFirewall module specifically protects against rootkits that hook deeply into the operating system. The new user interface includes a "1-Click Fix-it" feature; if there’s any problem with security, the user just clicks the "Fix it" button. From the Identity Protection Center users can monitor credit reports on a daily basis and actively protect personal information both online and offline.

As always, the suite features protection against viruses, spyware, and spam. It also warns users against fraudulent phishing URLs, offers parental-control protection, and secures your PC when connected to public wireless networks.

ZoneAlarm Internet Security Suite 8.0 is available now at www.zonealarm.com. A single-user license costs $49.95, while a 3-user license is $69.95. PC Magazine will offer a full review and evaluation as soon as we complete our extensive testing regimen.

Printer Maker Offers To Help People Print Less

A leading printer maker wants to help you do less printing.

Printing an article off the Web often produces several pages of waste, including ads, links and boxes for entering text. So the latest version of a Web toolbar from Lexmark International Inc. gives people more ways to block such images from coming out of the printer, saving ink and paper.

Some of Lexmark’s tools already exist in standard printer settings, but accessing them normally requires several mouse clicks. Lexmark’s free program brings those functions to the forefront. For example, one click

converts a Web page into black and white for printing, extending the life of expensive color ink cartridges.

The Web software also extends the "printer-friendly" features many sites offer. Often those printer-friendly versions still carry logos and other graphics; the Lexmark tools let you eliminate those as well.

Although printer companies make much of their money from ink cartridges and other products that consumers constantly have to replace, Lexmark figures it can improve customer satisfaction. Most of the features work regardless of whether your printer was made by Lexmark, Hewlett-Packard Co. or another rival.

Lexmark has versions available for both Microsoft Corp.’s Internet Explorer and Mozilla’s Firefox browsers.

The Firefox version offers more functions. Lexmark says Firefox users tend to be more technically advanced, and thus open to more customization. While the Internet Explorer tool lets you eliminate images, for instance, the Firefox version lets you remove forms, links and other elements, too.

Craig Le Clair, a senior analyst at Forrester Research, said the Lexmark tools can help reduce office printing. Companies already have made progress going electronic with insurance claims, bank transactions and other paperwork, he said, and they are now turning to "the knowledge worker and the ad hoc use of paper."

But Le Clair said any effect will be small compared with initiatives such as centralized printing, through which companies can track usage by person or department much better than with individual printers at each desk.

Microsoft Buys ciao.com To Boost E-Shopping Search

Microsoft has agreed to buy Greenfield Online, owner of popular European price comparison website ciao.com, for about $486 million to boost its Internet search and e-commerce business in Europe.

Microsoft, whose $47.5 billion bid to buy Yahoo earlier this year failed after a long battle, said on Friday the acquisition - the latest in a series - should help it build a more consumer-friendly, results-oriented search engine.

"We call it ’instant answers’," said John Mangelaars, head of Microsoft’s consumer and online business in Europe. "I hope it’s getting very clear that we’ve very serious about EMEA," he added, speaking to Reuters by telephone.

Internet search is dominated by Google, which has 62 percent of the global search market and 79 percent in Europe, according to Web usage tracker ComScore.

Microsoft has a 2 percent market share in Europe and 9 percent worldwide, behind both Google and Yahoo. In Europe, Microsoft is also outranked by online auction site eBay and Russia’s Yandex.

But Mangelaars said buying ciao.com was an important step in Microsoft's attempt to distinguish itself by providing search results more useful to consumers, particularly shoppers, than those thrown up by a Google search.

For example, results of a Microsoft search for a particular camera model could include which prices were available from which retailers, and maps of where those retailers were, rather than just links to the manufacturer's and retailers' websites.

The acquisition follows those of Norwegian enterprise search company Fast for about $1.2 billion early this year and shopping-and-auction site jellyfish.com for an undisclosed sum last year.

Caio.com is active in seven European countries and attracts 19.6 million unique visitors per month in Europe, more than twice as many as rival kelkoo.com, according to ComScore, thanks to its large network of members who contribute product reviews.

To attract more users, Microsoft also plans to reward consumers who buy products through its shopping sites by giving them cash back, extending a trial started in the United States a few months ago.

"Google's trying to do all your search needs. What Microsoft is doing with this kind of acquisition is saying: 'We're going to be very good at the commercial side of search, the shopping'," said Forrester principal analyst Rebecca Jennings.

Herve le Jouan, ComScore's managing director, Europe, agreed. "Doing this shopping thing, I think, is a good move," he said, but cautioned that acquisitions alone would never bring Microsoft close to Google's market share in search.

"Nobody is able to compete right now with Google so there is nobody to buy to compete with Google," he said.

Microsoft's Mangelaars acknowledged the distance Microsoft had to cover, especially given the commercial edifice rapidly being built by online advertisers whose models depend on Google's particular view of the Web.

"It's a race," he said, "but we also believe it's very early days in search technology."

Microsoft's offer of $17.50 per share betters an earlier proposal by media-focused U.S. buyout firm Quadrangle Group to acquire the company for $15.50 a share, and represents a slight premium to Greenfield's closing price of $17.25 on Thursday.

On August 26, Greenfield had said it had received a $17.50 per share offer but did not reveal from whom. The latest offer represents a premium of about 10 percent over Greenfield's closing share price on August 25.

Microsoft said it had agreed to sell Greenfield's main business, which surveys consumer opinion online and sells the results to market researchers, to an unnamed financial buyer.

The companies expect both deals to close during the fourth quarter of 2008. Completion of the Greenfield sale to Microsoft does not depend on Microsoft's disposal of the online survey business, the two companies said.

Psystar Responds to Apple Suit, Will Countersue

Mac clone maker Psystar plans to file its answer to Apple's copyright infringement lawsuit Tuesday as well as a countersuit of its own, alleging that Apple engages in anticompetitive business practices.

Miami-based Psystar, owned by Rudy Pedraza, will sue Apple under two federal laws designed to discourage monopolies and cartels, the Sherman Antitrust Act and the Clayton Antitrust Act, saying Apple's tying of the Mac OS to Apple-labeled hardware is "an anticompetitive restrain of trade," according to attorney Colby Springer of antitrust specialists Carr & Ferrell. Psystar is requesting that the court find Apple's EULA void, and is asking for unspecified damages.

Springer said his firm has not filed any suits with the Federal Trade Commission or any other government agencies.

The answer and countersuit will be filed Tuesday afternoon in U.S. District Court for Northern California.

Pedraza attended a press conference his lawyers called to present how Psystar will defend its its OpenComputer Mac clone, which has been for sale online since April.

Psystar's attorneys are calling Apple's allegations of Psystar's copyright infringement "misinformed and mischaracterized." Psystar argues that its OpenComputer product is shipped with a fully licensed, unmodified copy of Mac OS X, and that the company has simply "leveraged open source-licensed code including Apple's OS" to enable a PC to run the Mac operating system.

Pedraza says he wants to make Apple's Mac OS "more accessible" by offering it on less expensive hardware than Apple.

"My goal is to provide an alternative, not to free the Mac OS," said Pedraza. "What we want to do is to provide an alternative, an option...It's not that people don't want to use Mac OS, many people are open to the idea, but they're not used to spending an exorbitant amount of money on something that is essentially generic hardware."

Apple will have 30 days to respond to Pystar's counter claim, and so far has declined to comment on the case.

Other legal experts say Psystar faces a tough legal challenge in proving Apple has engaged in antitrust behavior by loading its software on its own hardware and thereby allegedly harming consumers and competitors. Psystar's ability to prevail on the issue of having the latitude to load Apple's OS on its own hardware, given it has a licensing agreement with the company, may prove an easier road to hoe, legal experts note.

A newcomer to the PC scene, Psystar caused a stir when it first went online selling white box Macs earlier this year. The site went down hours after it opened for business because the company was overwhelmed with orders for the OpenComputer, originally called the OpenMac, which was then changed to its current name. And the site went down several more times as its payment-processing company pulled its services from

the Psystar site. Psystar managed to stay shrouded in a bit of mystery for a while, until intrepid gadget blog readers joined the press in fleshing out some details about the company.

Psystar eventually got back online with a new payment-processing service, and it continues to take orders for the OpenComputer and OpenPro Computer. When Apple finally did file suit against Psystar in July, it surprised nearly no one - except perhaps Pedraza. He said he had no contact with Apple before legal papers were filed against his company. Customarily, there is some sort of communication between companies before lawsuits are filed.

For now, Pedraza says it will be "business as usual" at company headquarters. Though he said there was a "slight" downward dip in sales once Apple filed its suit, he plans to go ahead with making servers, and soon, a mobile product, which he said will be "like a notebook." But he refused to offer more detail.

Psystar Countersues Apple on Antitrust Grounds

Mac clone maker Psystar officially responded to Apple’s copyright infringement lawsuit on Thursday by filing a countersuit that alleges anticompetitive business practices.

As expected, the 54-page complaint, filed in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, charges Apple with restraint of trade, unfair competition, and other violations of antitrust law. Miami-based Psystar, owned by Rudy Pedraza, requests that the court find Apple’s end-user license agreements (EULA) void and seeks unspecified compensatory and punitive damages.

"The present litigation is more complex than the misinformed and mischaracterized allegations of copyright infringement," attorney Colby Springer, of antitrust specialists Carr & Ferrell, said in a statement. "The litigation involves the anticompetitive nature of the Apple EULA and similar anticompetitive tactics related to the misuse of Apple’s copyrights."

Psystar argues that its OpenComputer product is shipped with a fully licensed, unmodified copy of Mac OS X, and that the company has simply "leveraged open source-licensed code including Apple’s OS" to enable a PC to run the Mac operating system.

Pedraza said says his company is "allowing more people to take advantage of a great operating system that Apple has created at a more accessible cost than the pricey Mac."

Apple will have 30 days to respond to Psystar’s countersuit and so far has declined to comment on the case.

Legal experts say Psystar faces a tough legal challenge in proving Apple has engaged in antitrust behavior by loading its software on its own hardware and thereby allegedly harming consumers and competitors. Psystar’s ability to prevail on the issue of having the latitude to load Apple’s OS on its own hardware, given it has a licensing agreement with the company, may prove an easier row to hoe, legal experts note.

A newcomer to the PC scene, Psystar caused a stir when it first went online selling white-box Macs earlier this year. The site went down hours after it opened for business because the company was overwhelmed with orders for the OpenComputer, originally called the OpenMac. The site went down several more times as its payment-processing company pulled its services from the Psystar site. Psystar managed to stay shrouded in a bit of mystery for a while, until intrepid gadget-blog readers joined the press in fleshing out some details about the company.

Psystar eventually got back online with a new payment-processing service, and it continues to take orders for the OpenComputer and OpenPro Computer. When Apple finally did file suit against Psystar in July, it surprised nearly no one--except perhaps Pedraza. He said he had no contact with Apple before legal papers were filed against his company. Customarily, there is some sort of communication between companies before lawsuits are filed.

Comcast Limits Homes To 250GB in New Public Policy

Comcast has made it official: Home Internet service customers are limited to 250GB of data per month. According to the company, the move is in response to heavy usage by some customers that can cause network congestion.

The new policy was posted on Comcast’s Web site early Friday, and the meter starts running on Oct. 1.

Charlie Douglas, director of corporate communications for online services, said, "The amount of data measured is aggregate monthly usage of uploads and downloads."

And Comcast has added some teeth to the usage limit - the first time the limit is exceeded, the offending customer will receive a phone call from a Comcast representative. The second violation will result in a shutdown of Internet service for one year.

The amended service policy states in part: "It’s no secret we’ve been evaluating a specific monthly data usage or bandwidth threshold for our Comcast High-Speed Internet residential customers for some time." The threshold is high for the majority of Comcast users.

Examples of what a 250GB limit equates to are cited in the amendment, such as sending 50 million e-mails, downloading 62,500 songs, 125 standard-definition movies, or uploading 25,000 high-resolution digital photos. The policy says the median monthly usage for residential Comcast customers is 2GB to 3GB per month.

Some observers say Comcast has a reasonable argument. The company has expanded rapidly into business and residential phone service, meanwhile maintaining its large cable-television enterprise. There is only so much available bandwidth at any given time.

Comcast is moving data, voice and television and high-definition video over the same pipes. It only takes a few peer-to-peer file-sharing applications to cause unexpected congestion.

Comcast’s previous efforts to address the problem brought a rebuke from

the Federal Communications Commission. Comcast was caught throttling down the connections of BitTorrent P2P users on its network without their knowledge.

When the matter came before a congressional subcommittee, Comcast admitted to the practice and was ordered to stop gating individual connections. The FCC and Congress felt the targeting of individual accounts without notification was the main issue.

In its new policy Comcast is not limiting bandwidth on the sly, nor is it keeping its policies private. In fact, the company is posting a banner ad on its home page and sending flyers detailing the new policy to each of its customers in September. The company has also posted suggestions for using download-metering software that will track usage, much like the minute counters on cell phones.

Douglas emphasized, "This does not affect our commercial customers." Comcast has been aggressively moving into unified data services for commercial accounts, and some, especially those involved in backup and disaster recovery, could go over the 250GB limit, but that service is separate from residential accounts, said Douglas.

"We need to remember that the amount of usage we are talking about, more than 250GB a month, does not apply to more than 99 percent of our customers. So the less than 1 percent who are notified today receive a phone call from Comcast asking them to moderate their usage, which the vast majority of them do voluntarily," Douglas said.

Other broadband providers are also likely to publicize limits.

Facing Extradition, British Hacker Makes Last Stand

After eight years of litigation, accused British hacker Gary McKinnon is set to be extradited to the United States to stand trial.

Shortly after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, computer break-ins at more than 90 U.S. military and governmental agencies caused severe security compromises and data destruction. In 2002, U.S. investigators reportedly tracked the software used for the attacks to an e-mail account belong to McKinnon’s girlfriend. Since that time, the United States has sought McKinnon’s extradition.

On Thursday, the European Court of Human Rights - where appeals had escalated the case - finally gave the OK to send McKinnon to the United States. But in what some see as a last-ditch effort to keep McKinnon on British soil, reports are circulating that the 42-year-old has just been diagnosed with Aspberger’s syndrome. Aspberger’s is often described as a form of high-functioning autism. In itself, this diagnosis wouldn’t prevent his trial in the United States, but British law may see things differently.

McKinnon has already admitted publicly that he broke into U.S. government computer systems, but he maintains he did no damage. Justice Department officials charge, however, that he compromised and deleted records at a key naval-operations center in New Jersey and repeatedly crashed systems belonging to NASA and the Pentagon. McKinnon claims he

was snooping for evidence of a UFO cover-up by the U.S. government.

Allegedly, McKinnon posted the following message on a military computer system during his months-long spree: "U.S. foreign policy is akin to government-sponsored terrorism these days ... It was not a mistake that there was a huge security stand down on September 11 last year ... I am SOLO. I will continue to disrupt at the highest levels."

McKinnon and his lawyers rejected several plea offers by the United States, instead taking their case all the way up the British court system and then to the European Court of Human Rights. There are reports that the last rejected plea deal would have netted McKinnon a mere six months in low-security lockup. His attorneys have been steadfast in blocking extradition, however, as they fear it sets a dangerous precedent in international law.

Tensions are high in the United Kingdom on this issue, with many reporters and pundits claiming McKinnon is the victim of a post-9/11 witch hunt, or that he will face an incredibly heinous sentence in the United States. According to one British editorial, "... he [McKinnon] could well receive a grossly disproportionate sentence for an offence that would be dealt with in this country with a fine and community service."

Other editorials are painting McKinnon as a scapegoat. Some British hysterics are postulating McKinnon will get up to 60 years of hard time in the United States. Estimates from legal experts in the United States, however, indicate he’s more likely to face fines and less than seven years in prison.

U.S. Justice Department officials would not comment on McKinnon’s imminent arrival, and for good reason: McKinnon is taking his last-ditch Aspberger’s plea to Britain’s Home Secretary Jacqui Smith. If it is rejected there, however, McKinnon could be in a U.S. facility in seven to 10 days.

Amazon To Offer New Versions of Kindle e-Book Reader

Amazon will ship new versions of its Kindle e-book reader before year’s end. The original reader launched last November sold out in its first week and had Amazon scrambling to fill holiday orders. While sales have been brisk, estimates vary.

A Seattle newspaper confirmed late last week that Amazon.com is in the late stages of rolling out two new versions of Kindle. Reports unconfirmed by Amazon indicate there will be at least two new devices - one with a new user interface but the same dimensions of the original paperback-sized reader, and another the size of an 8-by-11-inch sheet of paper. Other tantalizing details are that the new readers may sport color choices.

The original Kindle has been criticized for its bland appearance and somewhat clunky controls, so color and a new interface could help sales. Not that Amazon seems to be complaining. Low estimates of current Kindle sales are pegged at around 230,000 units shipped in nine months, while others speculate that more than 380,00 have been sold.

According to Mark Mahaney, a financial analyst at Citigroup, "Although (Amazon) has not disclosed Kindle sales, our collection of data points leads us to double our ’08 unit assumption from 190,000 to 380,000. In its first year, that’s exactly how many iPods were sold. Turns out the Kindle is becoming the iPod of the book world."

The $5.5 billion textbook market is prime turf for the Kindle and Amazon. While e-book readers have made no significant dent in the market yet, a number of factors may push things along.

The chief complaint among students is textbook prices. Electronic versions can drive down both the production and distribution costs.

Another problem is weight. Students are lugging tens of pounds of books to and from classes.

Add to the mix that the Kindle has a built-in MP3 player and wireless 3G connectivity, and there may be much more under the hood than boring history books. While McGraw-Hill estimates that 90 percent of its textbooks are available in e-book format, other publishers may be well behind that figure.

One of the factors driving the market is innovative screen technology from companies such as Cambridge, MA-based E-Ink, which licenses its E-Ink ’paper’ screens to a number of vendors, including Amazon, Sony and Blackberry.

Current e-book readers can be difficult to read and practically useless in some situations. The latest screens are not backlit, and therefore are highly readable in a variety of settings, including full sunlight.

Amazon began the Kindle rollout with 90,000 titles available for instant download via the Sprint 3G network. Estimates of titles available now are at 140,000.

Sony, another big player in the e-book market, uses the same screen as the Kindle in its 505 model eReader. Larger form-factor E-Ink screens are in the Readius and the iRex iLiad, which runs a Linux-based operating system.

Pricing for the new Kindles is uncertain. The original debuted at $399 and was discounted to $349 midyear.

Mahaney said, "Based on our product review of Kindle (surprisingly good despite several V1 flaws), our tracking of its sales success to date (material according to our monitoring of customer reviews on Amazon’s Web site), and our analysis of potential adoption-curve paths (by comparing the iPod’s initial years ramp), we believe the Kindle could generate between $400 million and $750 million in revenue for (Amazon) by 2010 - or one to three percent of its revenue."

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